

FEATURED LIBRARY

**A Boutique Library Turns 50: The Norman Girvan Library of the Institute of International Relations,
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago
by Cherill Farrell and Tamara Brathwaite**

Boutique concept

We are all familiar with the term “boutique” as it applies to the hotel industry. The term conjures up a space that is well-positioned to offer welcoming and personalized services to the discerning client. These bespoke services are characteristically offered by persons who are well-trained and professionally equipped to meet client needs. Of late, in the literature, the adjective “boutique” is a concept being applied to another –not before thought of, but very customer focused service sector - the information services sector, and more particularly to the specialized services offered by libraries.

In their 2011 publication, *Boutique Libraries At Your Service*, Andy Priestner and Elizabeth Tilley devised a boutique model as it applies to libraries, outlining the following components: customer-focused, highly tailored, trend-setting and reactive, high degree of autonomy, unique services and resources and personalized. They contend that: “[T]he boutique library service benefits from being distinct and separate enough from other parts of the model to allow autonomous service development, but sufficiently integrated into the whole to provide a coherent environment.”

Situated on the St. Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies in Trinidad and Tobago, the Library of the Institute of International Relations aptly embodies the approach of a boutique library. It is known for providing a warm, welcoming ambience as the staff project customer service excellence in the delivery of library services. As a support to the teaching and learning programmes of the Institute of International Relations, these specialized library services are vital to the research and curriculum, and function as part of the centralized information services of the St. Augustine Campus Libraries network.

History of the Library

When the Institute of International Relations opened its doors in 1966, by way of a formal agreement between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Government of Switzerland, it was entrusted with the teaching of International Relations at the graduate level and the conduct of research concerning the international challenges of the contemporary world. Yet, despite its global character, it maintained and continues to maintain a steady focus on the Caribbean and Latin American regions. In 1973, the regional character of the Institute was enhanced by a formal agreement regarding the financing of

the Institute that included the Governments of Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago.

As a vital part of the infrastructure for teaching and research, a gift of UN documents and a special grant of \$4000USD was made by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to establish the Library. Additionally, the Government of Switzerland provided an additional contribution of 20,000 CHF. Now, half a century later, and at its fiftieth anniversary, the Library has grown exponentially to house a specialized collection of over 30,000 monographs. It provides access to over 200 e-journals and databases related to the field of international relations and global studies, and supports a popular and burgeoning DVD collection. The Library is also home to the collections of books and papers of the late Dr. Roy Prieswerk, a former Swiss Director of the Institute and Dr. Herb Addo, a Ghanaian and former Reader at the Institute.

What makes the Library service “boutique”

On the point of boutique services, the Library offers specialized services to Students, Staff, Alumni, Fellows and visiting researchers. Some of these specialized services include the hosting of a discussion series called “Biblochats”, the pioneering of unique information literacy orientation for new students, engaging in outreach programmes to Guyanese and Surinamese students and providing on-demand research support to all users. The Library also extends library privileges and facilities to Government Researchers and Analysts, the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs, the Caribbean Child Rights Observatory Network (CCRON), the Diplomatic Academy of the Caribbean and international agencies and their Staff. In addition, select displays, documentaries and film screenings are also featured in the Library to coincide with UN Observances and other special events.

Within the realm of centralized services, the Library has gone on-stream with the Integrated Library system, ALEPH, acquired by the Alma Jordan Library for the St. Augustine Campus Libraries, and offers access to online journals, databases and e-resources via the UWI Libraries e-portal, UWIIinC. Services are further extended to undergraduate students registered in the Faculty of Social Science and the Faculty of Law at the University. Staff engage in a high level of cooperation and collaboration as part of the St. Augustine Campus Libraries network and the extensive UWI reach offers great opportunities for networking on the campuses.

The foundation for such a small yet robust library service was laid by the Institute’s first Librarian, Yola Alleyne, who took the helm at the Institute on December 1, 1966. Former Acting Director, the late Frank Barsotti, has noted that throughout her 29 years of dedicated service, Ms. Alleyne maintained “a specialized library of which any Institution can be proud and one about which highly favourable comments from overseas scholars as well as local researchers are still constantly expressed”, years after her tenure. Indeed, Ms. Alleyne laid the groundwork for the evolution of the boutique concept by her delivery of the “*personalized customer service experience.*” This model has been emulated by all subsequent librarians with the result being a loyal patron base who maintain frequent interaction with library staff, and a clientele who generously pay homage to the Library’s services. This is further reflected in the Executive Summary Report of *The University of the West Indies St. Augustine (UWISTA) Student and Academic Staff Satisfaction Survey*

Results (presented January 31st, 2011), where the Institute's library is ranked as one of the libraries with "the highest levels of satisfaction with staff interaction."

Renaming of the Library

Today, the Library turns 50 years old. As part of our fiftieth anniversary celebrations, the Library has been renamed the *Norman Girvan Library of the Institute of International Relations* to posthumously honour the late Jamaican Professor, Norman Girvan, Professor Emeritus and Professorial Research Fellow of the Institute who passed away in 2014. During his life, he made a tremendous contribution to the scholarship of the region and the world and proudly, many of his published works live on in the Library.

Despite the pressures of a stringent economic climate, the Library continues to respond to the demands of the International Relations curriculum, the changing international climate and a growing IR base serving not only the postgraduate International Relations scholar but also undergraduate students in various faculties, the campus community, the diplomatic community, the nation, the region and an international network of alumni.

The staff of the Library remain committed to upholding *sterling information service* as a time-honored motto. As such, the Library will continue to strive to capture that endearing quality that always makes patrons feel welcome. It has embraced the notion that libraries can offer specialized personalized information services to the search weary patron and will continue to offer boutique library services to all persons who come into contact with the Library, whether it be virtually or in person.

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About the authors:

Cherill Farrell is the Head Librarian at the Institute of International Relations at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago. Email: cherill.farrell@sta.uwi.edu

Tamara Brathwaite is an Alum and former Librarian at the Institute of International Relations Library, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine and is now an Associate Librarian at the UN. Email: brathwaite1@un.org

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